

# Borders Broadband

## Herefordshire and Gloucestershire

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### **What is this project about?**

This project aims to find the most effective and sustainable way to provide faster and better broadband services to parts of rural Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, which wouldn't get an improved service from commercial telecoms companies otherwise because of the costs involved.

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### **Who is behind it?**

The high-speed broadband pilot is being managed by a partnership of Herefordshire Council, Gloucestershire's Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) GFirst, Gloucestershire County Council, and Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), the Government's agency for introducing high-speed broadband.

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### **Why was this area chosen?**

The Borders Broadband project was selected as a pilot project by BDUK to demonstrate how high-speed broadband could be brought into rural areas south of Hereford and in the Forest of Dean. However, to achieve the best price from suppliers, the contract will be for all the rural areas of the two counties. Deployment of the new service will start in what were the pilot areas.

This area was chosen because without significant public investment, its rural communities are unlikely to get significant improvement to their currently poor internet service. This project is extremely complex and challenging. Part of the remit is to identify new ways of providing an enhanced broadband service across rural areas, which the telecoms sector would not normally consider commercially viable.

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### **How much will the project cost?**

The total cost of superfast broadband provision for the two counties is an estimated £50 million, making the project one of the area's biggest infrastructure investments over the next seven years. It will be paid for by public and private funds, with private investment providing most of the money. The public subsidy will be used to top up private funding, and ensure that the most rural parts of the two counties are included. This project's task is to ensure that our area gets the very best deal, putting the right infrastructure in place to support enhanced broadband across as wide an area as possible.

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### **Who will get improved broadband?**

The aim is for all rural areas in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire to gain access to at least 2Mbps (megabits per second) broadband speeds with 30Mbps speeds available to as many people as possible. The areas for the different speeds will not be finally confirmed until the procurement process has been completed, and may change if specific difficulties are found during the roll-out.

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### **When will it all happen?**

The procurement process started at the beginning of June 2011. The long and complex process stipulated by UK and European rules will result in a contract being awarded to the successful supplier in late Spring 2012. The timescales are long to allow detailed discussions with several suppliers during a 'competitive dialogue' process as part of an EU-wide procurement. We anticipate that work on the physical infrastructure/s proposed in the winning contract will begin from summer 2012.

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### **What will improved broadband service levels be like?**

Many parts of rural Gloucestershire and Herefordshire don't even have access to an adequate broadband service yet, let alone high-speed broadband. Currently the Government's minimum level of acceptable broadband service, at speeds of 2 Megabits per second, is not available to around 20% of the two counties.

This project aims to remedy that. The successful company will be expected to provide:

- 100% access to 2Mbps in the Forest of Dean/South Herefordshire during 2013 and in the rest of rural Gloucestershire and Herefordshire during 2015
- As close as possible to 100% access to superfast broadband of 30Mbps in the Forest of Dean/South Herefordshire during 2015 and in the rest of rural Gloucestershire and Herefordshire during 2018

The aim is to make the superfast services available to everyone who wants them within seven years of awarding the contract. However, speed is not the only criteria - we will be looking for a reliable service where the speed does not drop too severely during busy periods and which is capable of supporting everyone who wants a fast service.

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### **What will I have to pay for improved broadband?**

We don't know yet. The new improved service will enable a range of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to compete for business and residential customers. Each ISP will therefore have a menu of services and packages, with a range of prices from basic to high speed to meet customer needs.

We anticipate charges will be at industry standard prices. Although this project is publicly funded, the broadband services provided will not be subsidised - therefore the charges to customers will need to make the service sustainable in the longer term. Charges for connection to your home, business or community building will depend on the technology used and will be subject to discussion during the procurement of the supplier.

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### **Will high-speed broadband use my existing broadband connection?**

Most people in the areas concerned have their broadband service over their phone lines, with the infrastructure maintained by BT Openreach. It is possible that this will continue to be the case, but the project is undertaking an open procurement where any provider may propose a solution.

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### **What technologies will be used to deliver high-speed broadband?**

Broadband can be delivered through a range of technologies such as fibre optic, wireless and satellite. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. The exact technologies eventually used to bring enhanced broadband will be decided during the procurement process, although we anticipate there may be a need for a mix of the very latest telecommunications technologies. The eventual mix will deliver the best value service and ensure that the greatest access to the highest speeds is achieved.

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### **It has been announced that my exchange is being upgraded – does this mean the project doesn't affect me?**

BT Openreach has announced that some exchanges are being upgraded but generally this has been to ADSL2+ (a broadband service using existing copper telephone lines) which can offer up to 20Mbps speeds but not the 30Mbps speeds being sought. These exchange areas will still be covered by the Borders Broadband project.

Some exchanges are being upgraded to BT Infinity (broadband via fibre optic cable) bringing 30Mbps speeds to many homes and businesses on those exchanges. These will not be included in the project. However, even if BT upgrades an exchange, the fibre-optic infrastructure might not necessarily reach all subscribers covered by that exchange, and therefore that would need to be a consideration of Borders Broadband project.

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### **What if the exchange that serves my telephone line is beyond the borders of the county?**

The project area covers all homes and businesses in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire that we don't expect to be provided with faster broadband without government intervention. How broadband, or a telephone service, is currently delivered to a property is irrelevant to our requirement.

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### **What happens if we can't achieve 100% coverage?**

The project is committed to delivering the infrastructure to support at least a 2Mbps service to all homes and premises in the coverage area, with as many as possible receiving a faster service. Where an area is not being provided with a high-speed service by the chosen supplier, an alternative approach to providing that service will be identified.

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### **What do USC and NGA stand for, and what do these terms mean?**

USC = Universal Service Commitment; NGA = Next Generation Access. The term USC relates to an internet download speed of 2 Megabits per second and was introduced in the Government's Digital Britain report of 2009 as the minimum broadband speed that should be available to every home or business premises in the UK. The Government funding is to ensure that this minimum USC level service is met, but in practice most homes should get faster services. For the purposes of the Borders Broadband project,

NGA means infrastructure that offers access to internet download speeds of at least 30 Mbps with at least 5 Mbps upload speed and with the option to offer services with the same upload and download speeds.

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### **How can communities get involved?**

A network of community broadband champions has been established to ensure local areas are kept up-to-date with the project, can provide feedback and contribute to the project. The most important task before the contract is awarded is that demand questionnaires are completed. Later in the programme we aim to increase the work on raising awareness of the benefits of broadband to ensure there is a good level of take up. There could also be local projects to make community venues more "technology friendly" to increase the range and use of venues e.g. for computer classes.

It is difficult to say at the moment how local communities may need to help with the deployment of the network until the final supplier is selected. In some other parts of the UK, communities have assisted with ground works or established community-run/ owned networks.

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### **Figures of £14.4m and £50m have been quoted for the project, so which is it?**

BDUK has allocated £14.4m for the rural areas of Gloucestershire and Herefordshire from their national budget of £530m. The £50m is an indicative cost for the whole Borders Broadband project, including the BDUK contribution, the private sector investment and expected local contributions. The actual cost will be determined by the current procurement exercise, but will be funded from the same sources.

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### **What will happen if the project doesn't have enough money to pay for the proposed service?**

The project will need to consider what options are on the table from providers. This will be one of the first BDUK-funded projects to establish the actual costs of delivering fast broadband to rural areas, and can be shared with other geographic areas as the investment in rural broadband is delivered nationally. The key advantage for Herefordshire and Gloucestershire is that we will be ahead of many areas in the country and suppliers would want to show that their solutions work. Borders Broadband continues to explore other funding opportunities to support the project, for example the newly announced DEFRA Rural Community Broadband Fund.

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### **What will high-speed broadband mean for local businesses?**

Businesses are increasingly dependent on the internet. Therefore, faster broadband speeds are imperative to help local businesses to compete in national and global markets. Fast and efficient internet connections bring a host of benefits to businesses from online selling (e-commerce), to transferring large documents to accessing emerging "cloud computing" services that can save costs and increase efficiency.

Good communications are key for business development and demand for faster upload and download speeds is expected to grow substantially in the coming years.

Increasingly, hundreds of rural businesses reliant on visitors from home and abroad

are expected to have an efficient online presence with online booking and information. Access to high-speed broadband will open up massive new opportunities for rural businesses. It will help firms develop more productive and efficient ways of working, making it quicker, cheaper and easier to communicate with suppliers and customers. Businesses can make cost savings by introducing 'Voice over IP' (VOIP) for phone calls over the internet, removing paper transactions and introducing more electronic processes, such as online invoicing.

The availability of two-way video conferencing allows firms to make more use of home working for employees, improving their work-life balance and increasing skills and staff retention. Online training reduces staff downtime and faster broadband services can foster business innovation, helping spread new ideas and knowledge and encouraging the development of new online services and applications. And for small businesses, broadband opens up new national and international markets exploiting the rapid growth of e-commerce.

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### **What will high-speed broadband mean for local people?**

While many people are content with low broadband speeds for dealing with day-today emails, increasingly broadband is used for video-conferencing with family and friends across the world via free services such as Skype. Increasingly, national and local government are using websites and other online services to provide vital information, while internet shopping often gives consumers access to the best deals – particularly those living in rural areas with limited access to a wide range of retail opportunities.

Advances in technology open up a range of new services, such as telemedicine – allowing people to make direct contact with care professionals in their own homes, via the internet, making rural healthcare services faster and more efficient. And with the growth in elderly populations, fast broadband offers the potential for assisted living technologies, such as improved emergency communications or monitoring of clinical conditions.

People also want to look at photos, watch films, listen to and download music and play games on the internet, and access to i-Player type services is becoming easier with 'smart' televisions. But with more people in the home using a range of broadband services at the same time, existing internet speeds can be frustratingly slow.

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### **What will high-speed broadband mean for local communities?**

For local communities, faster broadband opens up the opportunity for the creation of localised content such as community TV, or online streaming of local events. And forward-thinking parish and town councils seeking to engage more fully with their communities are looking to online messaging and social networking opportunities.

Superfast broadband also has immense potential in education and training, with increasing opportunities for students to access and submit work online, and to enrich their studies. The pressure of university fees is also increasing demand for distance learning among young people entering higher education, while online training offers a cost effective alternative to rural businesses, reducing employees' 'downtime' while increasing skills.

The availability of high-speed broadband will also boost the local economy, helping attract new businesses and provide more jobs in rural areas, reducing the need for local people to commute to work elsewhere, and increasing local job opportunities for young people.

Evidence shows the absence of fast broadband services puts businesses off locating to a particular area and increasingly estate agents are reporting that house hunters are stipulating fast broadband access as a 'must have'.

This project will work very closely with local communities – we envisage them playing a major role in establishing and stimulating demand, supporting those people who will be new to computers and the internet, and possibly in delivering the fastest service to more remote homes, farms and local businesses. If you would like to get involved, see below for contacts.

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### **How can I find out more?**

Email [bordersbroadband@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:bordersbroadband@herefordshire.gov.uk) or:

For Herefordshire contact **Alan Ronald, Herefordshire Council, 01432 260177, [aronald@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:aronald@herefordshire.gov.uk)** or **Nadine Kinsey, Herefordshire Council, 01432 260440, [nkinsey@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:nkinsey@herefordshire.gov.uk)**

For Gloucestershire contact **Angela Presdee, GFirst, 01452 328309, [Angela.Presdee@glosfirst.co.uk](mailto:Angela.Presdee@glosfirst.co.uk)**

For any interested parties wishing to express an interest in procurement, please contact **Bob Gennard, 01432 261617 [rgennard@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:rgennard@herefordshire.gov.uk)**

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